



Coalition Formation—How to Create a Coalition on Disaster Recovery



“A coalition monitors, analyzes and mobilizes community efforts.”

What is a Coalition and How Can It Help?

A disaster recovery coalition is an organization of concerned citizens which advocates for services, policies and programs to accomplish specific goals that impact disaster recovery and prevention. A coalition monitors, analyzes, and mobilizes community efforts. A local coalition may assume several roles. Among these are:

- Monitoring existing programs, services and policies.
- Providing information and advice to decision-making officials in the community.
- Undertaking special projects or activities.
- Providing public awareness and information to the community with ideas for how the community can address those problems.
- Initiating policy ideas and programs.

Concerned citizens, as individuals or as representatives of existing groups, are encouraged to take the initiative to mobilize community disaster prevention coalitions. Starting the process requires the commitment of at least one organization or person to do some preliminary work related to defining the problem, specifying the location for coordinated efforts, and making the initial selection of key people and groups to involve.

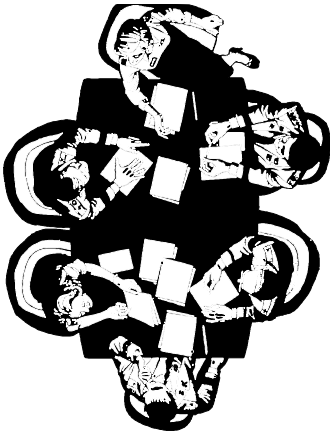
Forming Your Coalition

It is important that the group have broad representation from professional, community and school leaders. Churches, PTAs, shelters and food pantry groups, social service agencies, the legal system, medical system and the news media should be represented within the group. Young people should also be involved.

Names of community leaders and persons to be involved can be obtained by consulting the staffs of schools, churches, recreation centers, social service centers, civic groups, social welfare

This document is IFAS publication DH 2007.

Adapted by UF/IFAS from:
Stress and Coping With Disaster: A Handbook Compiled Following the Midwest Flood of 1993 for Extension Professionals, compiled by Marty Baker and Ami O'Neill



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agencies, etc. These individuals could then be invited to an organizational meeting.

In order to form a representative group of people who are concerned or affected by the issue of disaster, try to determine who is missing from the group, which population groups are most likely to be interested in the group's goals and issues, what motivation can be provided to get these persons to join the effort and what steps should be taken to achieve balanced participation.

Advance publicity should be issued for the first and all general meetings. Use existing communication networks within schools, churches, neighborhood organizations, businesses and the media.

At your meeting, you might want to discuss problems caused in your community by a disaster. These problems could be documented through data available from your local officials, health departments, schools and shelters. Statistics on the number of people affected by the disaster can help you assess the extent of the problem in your community.

Well-defined goals should be established for the group and should include services, public awareness and advocacy activities. Methods for evaluating group progress should also be well-defined.

A chairperson should be designated to facilitate the operations of the coalition. That person should chair the meetings, designate responsibility, and coordinate the group's community efforts.

To sustain involvement in the coalition, you will need to emphasize creative efforts directed towards a solution. Feelings of group progress and success may serve to encourage participation. Possible approaches include establishing a timetable of needed steps and achieving these deadlines, setting up small accomplishments and working toward the success of these.

A mission statement will help define your coalition. It states the coalition's overall purpose. It can explain what the coalition is, why it exists, and what it does. Since the coalition is made up of many organizations and people, a mission statement can help provide an identity for the coalition and clarify its role in disaster services and prevention. There should be a direct relationship between the coalition's mission statement, its definition of the

problem, its goals and objectives, and the steps it will take in reaching the goals.

Structuring Your Coalition's Operating Process



“Network with other groups in your community.”

- Describe the problem: scope, causes, previous attempts to solve it, people affected, and consequences if it is not solved.
- List possible solutions and necessary resources, how long will it take, will it have community support, etc.
- Set goals and objectives for each solution.
- Describe your activities to implement your solution: what tasks need to be done, who will do what, which tasks need to be done first, what skills are needed?
- List the resources you will need to carry out your activities: people, materials, money, political support, etc.
- Anticipate possible obstacles to your activities: what could go wrong, what risks can you foresee, who else has ideas about the problem, what is being done now and by whom to meet the need (and will they feel threatened by your proposed changes?)
- Develop evaluations of your progress: how much will be done by a target date, how well are the activities progressing, etc.

Organizational Issues in Forming a Coalition

- Your group should establish a name or title, mailing address and phone number with which to function and this information should appear on all group material and correspondence.
- You should establish one or two contact persons to receive all correspondence and calls.
- You will eventually need funds for stationary, postage and printing—unless these items and services can be taken care of by in-kind contributions.
- You will need a regular neutral place to hold your meetings.
- You must decide on how often you want to meet.
- Your group should identify specific goals and objectives which reflect the organizational direction of the task force.
- Those members involved or invited should represent a broad base of the community.
- It is important that professionals be included, but strong leadership should come from private citizens.

Coalition Activities

Public Awareness

- Local forum
- Film festival
- Speakers' bureau
- Television and radio public service announcements
- Posters

Direct services to disaster-affected children, teens and parents.



- Support groups
- Play groups
- Volunteer cleanup efforts
- Rebuilding efforts

“Planning is important. Successful programs are based on what the community wants.”

Pitfalls to Avoid

- Neglecting to involve or at least advise key people in the community about the coalition.
- Spending six months or more trying to define your purpose.
- Starting a study or survey that takes a year and prevents other decisions or actions until completion.
- Failing to reach a balance between process and task issues.
- Developing wonderful plans, but neglecting to assign responsibility for carrying them out.
- Neglecting to establish deadlines or at least target groups.
- Failing to develop the ability to deal with hard issues such as group leadership and agency turfism, local conservative or liberal attitudes.
- Turning into a discussion group rather than an action group.
- Failing to build in a process of self-evaluation.
- Losing sight of the people that the coalition should be assisting.

Successful programs are based on community needs. Gaining support takes time, effort and a willingness to see all community segments as critical stakeholders in disaster services and prevention.